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TAGS: [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [MU](#)  
SUBJECT: OMANI FOREIGN POLICY AS REFLECTED IN THE SPEECHES  
OF SULTAN QABOOS

Classified By: Ambassador Gary A. Grappo for Reasons 1.4 (b, d)

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SUMMARY  
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11. (C) Summary: In addition to being the longest-serving head of state in the GCC, Sultan Qaboos bin Sa'id is also one of the most consistent Arab leaders with respect to his stated views on foreign policy. An examination of the relatively limited number of public speeches he has given since taking power from his father in a bloodless coup in 1970 reveals an early and repeated emphasis on cooperation, dialogue, respect for international law, and non-interference in the affairs of other states. Beginning in the 1980s, the Sultan has also made recurring references to the need to reject religious extremism and oppose terrorism. Initially harsh statements about combating "Zionist aggression" soon gave way to a continued emphasis on solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (and other international disputes) through peaceful negotiations. Direct criticism of other countries has been very sparse, although the Sultan had harsh words for the Soviet Union prior to establishing full diplomatic relations with Moscow in 1985. The Sultan has never acknowledged his government's special relationships with the U.S and UK. While reflecting a certain degree of idealism, the foreign policy principles espoused by the Sultan are also pragmatic. By promoting dialogue and keeping on the best terms possible with others, the Sultan has positioned Oman well to take advantage of opportunities that could further his country's long-term interests. End Summary.

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A CONSISTENT CALL FOR PEACEFUL COOPERATION  
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12. (SBU) Under the rule of Sultan Qaboos' father, Sultan Sa'id bin Taymur, Oman primarily relied on Britain to take care of its world affairs and avoided establishing close relations with its Arab neighbors. Upon taking power in 1970, Sultan Qaboos quickly looked to shed this isolationism by promptly applying for admittance to the League of Arab States and the United Nations in 1971. On the occasion of Oman's second national day celebration on November 18, 1972, the Sultan gave a speech in which he noted the country's joining the international community and its expansion of diplomatic ties with other states. The following year, during the third national day festivities, the Sultan laid out what he called "guidelines" for Omani foreign policy that rested on: "good neighborliness," peaceful coexistence between nations, "mutual respect" for the sovereignty of other states, non-interference in the affairs of other countries, and exchange of mutual interests. Such an approach, according to the Sultan, would contribute to Oman's goal of helping to "resolve international problems" and "maintain peace and stability between the various countries of the world."

13. (SBU) The foreign policy principles announced by the Sultan in 1973 would be often repeated in other speeches (usually limited to no more than two per year) throughout his reign. On the ninth national day in 1979, for example, he emphasized Oman's hope of "fostering cooperation and understanding between peoples of the world," while also insisting on "observance of international law." In addressing the nation in 1981, the Sultan declared that Oman would "reject the friendship of no one" and that the future of the world rested in "peaceful and constructive cooperation," while in 1985 he pledged to "strive faithfully for friendship and cooperation" and advocated "eradicating tension and struggle by peaceful means."

14. (SBU) In 1988, Sultan Qaboos again summarized the foundation of Omani foreign policy: "These policies are based foremost on our firm belief in the principles of peaceful coexistence among the nations; good neighborliness between countries; non-interference in others' internal affairs; and mutual respect for national sovereignty." The Sultan restated these guiding principles almost verbatim four years later during Oman's 22nd national day, adding that international disputes "must be solved" through dialogue conducted in a "spirit of understanding." Speeches in 1995, 1997, 1998, 2002 and 2006 also expressly listed these principles as the basis of Oman's approach to conducting its international affairs.

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AN ADDED EMPHASIS ON MODERATION  
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15. (SBU) In addition to the long-standing guidelines

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described above, the Sultan would add a new pillar to Oman's foreign policy creed during the second decade of his reign -- a rejection of religious extremism and terrorism. On the occasion of Oman's 12th national day in 1982, Sultan Qaboos condemned "those who distort the teachings of our Muslim religion to serve their own political purposes;" he denounced "fanaticism and intolerance" the following year (1983). In 1985, the Sultan called for the elimination of "terrorism in all its forms," a call he would echo in ensuing years. The Sultan's national day speech in 1994 urged his subjects to reject religious extremism and declared that "obstinacy in religious understanding leads to backwardness in Muslims, prevalence of violence and intolerance."

16. (SBU) On the occasion of Oman's 21st national day, 14 days after the events of September 11, 2001, the Sultan stated that "we condemn and reject terrorism," while his speeches during the last several years have contained pleas for "tolerance" and "understanding" in order to help "eradicate ... violence and instability." Summarizing the consistency of Oman's foreign policy under his rule, the Sultan provided the following statement during his most recent public pronouncement (convening the fourth session of the Majlis Oman) on November 6, 2007: "We work for construction and development at home, and for friendship and peace, justice and harmony, coexistence and understanding, and positive constructive dialogue abroad. That is how we began, that is how we are today, and that, with God's permission, is how we shall continue to be."

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REFRAINING FROM FINGER-POINTING ...  
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17. (C) With very few exceptions, Oman has carefully followed the guidelines enunciated by the Sultan in conducting its diplomatic relations. In the few instances when the Sultan has publicly addressed specific international issues (outside the Middle East peace

process), he has refrained from directly criticizing a particular party or country and encouraged the reaching of a peaceful resolution through dialogue. For example, during his national day speech in 1985, the Sultan highlighted his strong support for "all mediation efforts to end the Iran-Iraq war" without apportioning blame or expressing backing for either combatant. In 1989, he similarly urged the revival of "negotiations" between Iraq and Iran, and called on "our brothers in Lebanon" to "cooperate with the newly elected [Lebanese] President to restore peace and harmony in all Lebanon."

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... BUT HARSH WORDS FOR THE FORMER USSR  
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18. (C) Apart from Israel, the only countries to come under direct fire from Sultan Qaboos in his public addresses have been South Yemen -- which repeatedly tried to foment unrest in southern Oman, including a rebellion effort in the Dhofar region from 1970-75 -- and the Soviet Union (a patron of South Yemen). [Note: Moscow and Muscat did not establish full diplomatic relations until 1985. End Note.] Although a member of the non-aligned movement, the Sultan blasted the "unbridled pursuit by the Soviet Union of policies of expansionism reminiscent of the worst periods of colonialism in the past" in his 1979 national day speech, as well as asserting that the national identity of South Yemen had been "virtually obliterated by the massive presence there of Soviet and Cuban satellite forces." The following year (1980), Sultan Qaboos lauded the "Muslim people of Afghanistan" for their "tenacious opposition to the Soviet invaders of their homeland" and also stated that instability in the world was due in part to the "unbridled ambitions of the Soviet Union." Verbal attacks against the USSR in the Sultan's public addresses soon disappeared, however, as relations with Moscow improved, leading to the eventual exchange of ambassadors.

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AN EARLY CHANGE IN TACK TOWARDS ISRAEL  
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19. (C) The one subject on which the Sultan made a marked correction (at least publicly) was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Perhaps reflecting his still relatively loose hold on power during the first years of reign, as well as heated public sentiments over the 1973 Arab-Israeli war, the Sultan's third national day speech in November 1973 declared Oman's "solidarity with our Arab brothers ... in standing against Zionist aggression and in supporting the

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Arab fight in restoring all Arab territories which the enemy has occupied by force, treachery and treason. We shall always support the Arab fight with blood and money and back it with all our powers." Six years later, however, with the Sultan much more secure in his rule, Oman was one of only three Arab League members to refuse to break diplomatic relations with Egypt after the Camp David peace accords. In his national day speech that same year, the Sultan stated: "The year has been a first, hopeful step along the road to peace in the Middle East ... Oman categorically declares that it will warmly support any constructive initiative by any Arab or other leader which may promise to lead to [the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict]."

110. (SBU) The Sultan's public references to the peace process throughout the 1980s and onwards consistently displayed empathy for the "suffering," "agony" and "unjust occupation" of the Palestinian people. His speeches addressing this subject, however, also consistently advocated a non-violent solution leading to the creation of a peaceful Palestinian state, and avoided vitriol directed

at Israel. With few exceptions, such as a call for "an end to Israeli intransigence" in 1985, the Sultan's speeches did not even mention Israel by name in referencing the "Middle East issue" or the "Middle East problem" (i.e., terms used by the Sultan for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict).

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COMMENT  
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¶11. (C) Comment: While the Sultan's relatively limited number of public speeches are an imperfect bellwether of Oman's foreign policy, and do not reflect the many private comments of Omani officials who feel more free to vent against certain countries, they nevertheless demonstrate that Oman has acted in a remarkably consistent way with its set of principles in approaching major international issues. Current Omani urging of the U.S. to engage in non-conditional dialogue with Tehran and to avoid sanctions in seeking to solve the Iranian nuclear file, for example, is a natural continuation of its history of encouraging dialogue -- not confrontation -- to end conflicts elsewhere in the region. Some may say that Oman's steadfast attachment to peaceful cooperation and non-interference in the affairs of others demonstrates too liberal a dose of idealism and, perhaps, even naivete. Yet these principles are also pragmatic; the Sultan does not overestimate his country's own influence, nor is he naive or pacific to the intentions of other nations towards Oman.

¶12. (C) By staying on the best terms possible with almost everyone (and encouraging others to do likewise), the Sultan has kept open the option of converting even former adversaries into potential partners, and has positioned Oman to take bold action (like embracing the Camp David accords) that, even if unpopular with other Arabs, promotes Oman's own long-term national interests. Finally, while he has never publicly acknowledged the Sultanate's strategic relationship with the U.S. and UK, these relationships nevertheless fit neatly with his principle of fostering "exchange of mutual interests." His decision to enter into the Base Access Agreement with the U.S. in 1980 further demonstrates his ability to act boldly when necessary while still remaining faithful to his foundation guidelines. End Comment.

GRAPPO